DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 472 301 EC 309 380

AUTHOR	Espe-Sherwindt, Marilyn
TITLE	"A Real Eye Opener": Can Parent-Faculty Partnerships Enhance Learning and Teaching in the Higher Education Classroom?
INSTITUTION	Family Child Learning Center, Tallmadge, OH.
SPONS AGENCY	Special Education Programs (ED/OSERS), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	2001-07-00
NOTE	11p.; Paper presented at the International Conference on Improving Learning and Teaching at the University (26th, Johannesburg, South Africa, July 2001). For related documents, see EC 308 379 and EC 309 381.
CONTRACT	H029K70125
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Disabilities; Educational Finance; Higher Education; *Inservice Teacher Education; Interdisciplinary Approach; *Parent Participation; Partnerships in Education; *Preservice Teacher Education; *Professional Development; *Program Evaluation; Special Education Teachers
IDENTIFIERS	Ohio

ABSTRACT

This paper examines a portion of the findings from the Ohio Higher Education Partnership Project (OHEPP), a federally funded project designed to develop a model for promoting greater levels of participation within institutions of higher education by parents of children with disabilities. From 1997 to 2001, OHEPP recruited, trained and supported parent-faculty teams within 12 institutions of higher education in Ohio. Parent involvement through those teams assumed a variety of shapes, the most common being that of some form of "co-instruction." Initial quantitative and qualitative analyses of student evaluations suggest that the involvement in higher education of parents of children with disabilities can affect not only student understanding, but also, perhaps, student behavior. (Author/SG)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

EC309380

ED 472 301

"A REAL EYE-OPENER:" CAN PARENT-FACULTY PARTNERSHIPS ENHANCE LEARNING AND TEACHING IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION CLASSROOM?

Paper Presented at the
26th International Conference on Improving Learning and Teaching at the University
Johannesburg, South Africa
July 2001

Marilyn Espe-Sherwindt, Ph.D.
Adjunct Assistant Professor,
Kent State University
Family Child Learning Center, Director
Children's Hospital Medical Center

OHEPP
Ohio Higher Education Partnership Project
143 Northwest Ave., Bldg. A
Tallmadge, OH 44278

The Ohio Higher Education Partnership Project and the publication of its materials are supported by Grant #HO29K70125, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

EC 309380

ABSTRACT

"A REAL EYE-OPENER": CAN PARENT-FACULTY PARTNERSHIPS ENHANCE LEARNING AND TEACHING IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION CLASSROOM?

In the United States, federal special education legislation has demanded a shift in the role of parents of children with disabilities from that of passive recipients of services to that of active partners with professionals in the education of their children. This paradigm shift has had implications for how we prepare our students, not only in terms of WHAT we teach, but also in HOW we teach. In other words, if we expect our students to be partners with families once they are working in the field, then perhaps we should be demonstrating those partnerships within the higher education classroom.

This paper examines a portion of the findings from the Ohio Higher Education Partnership Project (OHEPP), supported by grant funding from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. Since 1997, OHEPP has recruited, trained and supported parent-faculty teams within 12 institutions of higher education in northeast Ohio. Parent involvement through those teams has assumed a variety of shapes, the most common being that of some form of "co-instruction," i.e., repeated involvement throughout a course. Our initial quantitative and qualitative analysis of student evaluations suggests that the involvement in higher education of parents of children with disabilities can impact not only student understanding, but perhaps also behavior. Although not without their challenges, parent-faculty partnerships can indeed enhance the quality of teaching and learning for students, parents, and faculty.

"A REAL EYE-OPENER": CAN PARENT-FACULTY PARTNERSHIPS ENHANCE LEARNING AND TEACHING IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION CLASSROOM?

Marilyn Espe-Sherwindt
Family Child Learning Center
Children's Hospital Medical Center of Akron & Kent State University

During the 20th century, parents have played many roles in the education of their children with disabilities: as the sources of a child's problem, as members of parent organizations, as service organizers, as passive recipients of professionals' recommendations, as teachers and learners, and as political advocates (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1990). In the United States, the 1986 passage of amendments to our federal special education legislation signified a major paradigm shift in the role of parents: to that of *partners and decision-makers in how services are provided to their child with disabilities.* The concept of families as partners and primary decision-makers has required a significant shift from the traditional role of educator/therapist to that of empathetic listener, consultant, resource broker, mobilizer, problem-solver, mediator and advocate (Dunst, Trivette & Deal, 1988). Because the implementation of this new parent-professional partnership depends on professionals who are adequately prepared, the federal regulations that accompanied the special education amendments have emphasized that both preservice and inservice training must be interdisciplinary in nature and relate specifically to the theory and practice of partnerships and family-centered care. It should come as no surprise that the new role of families has consequences for the preparation of professionals to work in collaborative partnerships with them.

First, the new role of families has had significant implications for the *content* of training. For example, teacher education guidelines developed by national professional organizations are based on such key principles as 1) the significant role of families in early childhood development and education; 2) the importance of culturally competent professional behavior; and 3) the importance of collaborative interpersonal and interprofessional actions. Training and professional standards should be developed "to ensure effective collaboration with families, derived from an understanding of the experiences of families of young children, including those with disabilities; from a knowledge of specific strategies to establish and maintain productive relationships with families with diverse needs, experiences and preferences; and from a knowledge of specific legal requirements . . . With the implementation of family-centered services and the inclusion of young children with special needs in general community settings, there is a clear need for personnel to be able to work collaboratively with family members" (DEC, NAEYC & ATE, 1994, pp. 8-9,13). Specific competencies within the teacher education guidelines for both regular and special education identify a variety of professional practices that establish and maintain positive, collaborative relationships with families.

Second, the new role of families has impacted not only professional standards and content of what is taught in higher education, but also *how* the content is delivered.

Certain key elements with personnel preparation have been identified that support individual competence in working with young children and their families: a core interdisciplinary knowledge base, direct contact with children and families, individualized supervision, and collegial support (Fenichel & Eggbeer, 1990). A common recommendation that cuts across all four elements is that of using parents in the training of personnel: as instructors, mentors, and supervisors, for "as relationships between parents and professionals are reconceptualized, careful attention is needed to the training experiences that will enable professionals to assume supportive, informed, but nonauthoritarian roles" (p. 10). In other words, if we expect our students to be partners with families once they are working in the field, then perhaps we should be demonstrating those partnerships within the higher education classroom.

McBride, Sharp, Hains, and Whitehead (1995) identify three powerful outcomes that parent participation in personnel preparation can facilitate: 1) the modeling of family-provider collaboration; 2) the promotion of an affective understanding of family-centered practices; and 3) the infusion of a family-centered perspective throughout the course or curriculum. They cite data from courses they have taught using a co-instructional model; the questionnaire data indicate that students reported an increase of their knowledge, skills and attitudes toward family-centered practice. Furthermore, the involvement of parents of children with disabilities in the higher education classroom not only impacted students, but also the parents and the faculty. "We have found the engagement of family members in the training process with faculty to be an effective strategy for assisting faculty in gaining expertise in family-centered practice" (p. 344).

To what extent have parents actually been involved in preparing students within institutions of higher education? A recent literature search revealed 20,300 references under the descriptor *parents*, and 7,466 references under the descriptor *preservice*. Combining these descriptors reduced the number of references to 184, and adding a third descriptor, *role*, further limited the search to 46 references. However, only a handful of these references directly referred to the role of parents as instructors/presenters in higher education, while the remainder focused on involving parents in the education of their young children. Brown (1991) describes a graduate course offered at George Washington University in which a parent of a child with a disability assisted in instruction. The inclusion of a parent in an instructional role was based on the rationale that 1) students could be provided with a personal experience with a parent, and 2) a professional-parent instructional team provided a partnership that modeled the kind of collaboration required by the federal legislation. Whitehead and Sontag (1993) describe a similar attempt at parent-professional co-instruction at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. A survey by Campbell (1994) indicated increasing parent involvement within early intervention personnel preparation programs, with the typical role being that of "guest lecturer."

Given that parents of children with disabilities potentially have such a powerful role to play, why is parent involvement in higher education still so rare? Such factors as time, lack of financial support for families, and difficulty finding parents who are willing and interested may prevent faculty from making use of parents on more than a sporadic basis;

institutions of higher education are often challenged by the flexibility and financial supports needed to involve parents in instructional roles (Whitehead & Sontag, 1993). Parents themselves have identified similar barriers: 1) a model that adequately prepares parents to serve in instructional roles; 2) ongoing supports (mentoring and financial reimbursement) to parents who serve in those roles; and 3) adequate preparation of faculty so that they respect and utilize parents in effective ways (Capone, 1995). When faculty and families work together, it is crucial that both parties have a mutual understanding of expectations, levels of involvement, and how the relationship is to be defined (McBride et al., 1995).

What could happen, then, if these barriers were addressed? In 1997, the Family Child Learning Center (affiliated with the Children's Hospital Medical Center of Akron and Kent State University) received funding from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, to develop a model for promoting greater levels of participation within institutions of higher education by parents of children with disabilities. At that time, some attempts were being made to involve parents of children with disabilities in higher education in Ohio. As part of our needs assessment, we conducted a statewide survey of faculty from special education, early childhood, school psychology, and other related disciplines. Responses from 31 faculty representing 10 disciplines indicated that parents were involved in 57% of the courses being taught at that time. Of the 31 respondents, 11 (35%) reported that they had never involved parents. The typical role of parent involvement was that of "telling their story," usually via a panel presentation. Fewer than 10% of the faculty respondents involved a parent more than once during a course. The respondents perceived the following as the greatest barriers to parent involvement: no means for reimbursement, logistical factors such as parking and child care, and a limited number of topics where parent participation would be relevant.

Consequently, based on the literature and our own survey data, we viewed parent participation in higher education as a multi-faceted phenomenon that included the following components: a) developing parent skills and understanding of higher education; b) promoting access to and financial support of parents; and c) increasing faculty receptiveness to parent participation. By proposing a model of parent-faculty partnerships, we anticipated the following impacts: 1) an increased number of parents involved in higher education; 2) an increase in the number and types of courses in which parents are involved; 3) an expansion in the types of roles played by parents; 4) a change in how faculty view the value of parents; and, above all, 5) changes in how students view the value and role of parents of children with disabilities.

During the first three years of the Ohio Higher Education Partnership Project (OHEPP), we recruited 35 parents of children with disabilities and 33 faculty members from 12 institutions of higher education in northeast Ohio to participate in our project. Faculty disciplines included special education, early childhood, speech pathology, nursing, nutrition, medicine, audiology and occupational therapy. Groups of participating faculty and parents came together for one-day workshops in which we focused on overcoming the challenges to faculty-parent partnerships: role clarification, communication, expectations, and understanding the culture of higher education. At the

end of the workshop, each parent-faculty "team" developed a plan for how they were going to work together in the future. Following the workshop, we provided support in a variety of ways: a funding stream to support parent participation, a listserv for participating parents and faculty, "reunions," a Parent-Faculty Resource Directory distributed to participants, and ongoing telephone contacts. OHEPP parents and faculty were also encouraged to assist us in data collection: hours and types of activities, student evaluations, and identifying students for follow-up interviews.

Thus far, our data indicate that the OHEPP parents have devoted more than 2,100 hours to this project. Their activities have been broken down into the following categories:

- 41% "Co-instruction" (continuous involvement over the quarter or semester, although not necessarily every week)
- 32% Presentations (single or panel)
- 11% Developing activities and materials for presentation
- 5% Working with faculty to plan course and syllabus
- 3% Program/curricular review
- 8% Other (e.g., student selection, being interviewed for an assignment, etc.).

Interviews with faculty and parents participating in OHEPP identified challenges similar to those identified in the literature: the need to negotiate roles and responsibilities, the need to overcome stereotypes about the partner, and time involved in planning in order to make the relationship successful. Nevertheless, the project continued to grow because the participants were so enthusiastically recruiting more faculty and parents for us through their own "networks." Furthermore, the data indicate that our expectations were being met: parents indeed were utilized in different courses and in different ways that had not occurred previously in Ohio. The finding that almost half of the parent hours were spent in "co-instructional" activities suggests that many parents and faculty indeed were presenting a partnership model to the students in their classes.

The remainder of this paper explores our initial findings about OHEPP's short-term impacts on students. Each parent-faculty team was responsible for asking students to fill out an evaluation form, either after a parent presentation, or – if the parent were serving in an ongoing role – at the end of the quarter or semester. The evaluation form consisted of a series of statements rated on a five-point Likert scale, followed by two open-ended questions. Table 1 contains the analysis of the Likert-scale statements (n = 750 students, through September 1, 2000). Students represented two and four-year colleges, and both undergraduate and graduate enrollment.

Table 1. Student Perceptions of Parent-Faculty Partnerships

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
I had a good understanding of the topic prior to participating in this project.	n=49 6.5%	n=129 17.2%	n=277 36.9%	n=193 25.7%	n=102 13.6%	X=3.23
Inclusion of a parent increased my level of understanding of the topic.	n=14 1.9%	n=14 1.9%	n=72 9.6%	n=174 23.2%	n=474 63.2%	X=4.44
The parent generated handouts and activities helped make the issues clearer.	n=14 1.9%	n=36 4.8%	n=114 15.2%	n=200 26.7%	n=339 45.2%	X=4.16
I learned some new techniques that I will be able to use in my professional practices.	n=21 2.8%	n=42 5.7%	n=127 17.1%	n=266 35.5%	n=285 38.5%	X=4.01
The inclusion of a parent provided a helpful perspective.	n=16 2.2%	n=22 3.0%	n=49 6.6%	n=97 12.9	n=558 74.4%	X=4.56
The inclusion of a parent was appropriate for this class.	n=27 3.6%	n=2 10.0%	n=64 22.1%	n=219 29.5%	n=257 34.6%	X=4.56
The time allocated for parent participation was sufficient. **	n=22 4.2%	n=31 6.0%	n=72 13.8%	n=152 29.2%	n=243 46.7%	X=4.08
This was appropriate for our class.	n=6 .8%	n=16 2.1%	n=52 7.0%	n=95 12.7%	n=579 77.4%	X=4.64
I would recommend including parents in other classes.	n=8 1.1%	n=21 2.8%	n=48 6.4%	n=89 11.9%	n=580 77.7%	X=4.62

** This statement was not utilized during co-instruction partnerships.

These data suggest that students perceived that exposure to parents did increase their level of understanding, and that they perceived this exposure to be an appropriate and helpful learning experience. Furthermore, students indicated that this practice should continue in other courses within their program.

Qualitative content analysis procedures (Miles & Huberman, 1994) were used to analyze the responses to the open-ended questions ("What were the two most important ideas you learned from this parent?" and (Other comments?"). Two project researchers independently coded 500 statements and, based on their content, sorted them into tentative "organizing categories." The two researchers then met to compare their

categories (which were quite similar) and clarify key words and definitions for each category. Five "organizing categories" emerged from these conversations. The two researchers then reexamined each statement and, based on the key words and definitions, came to consensus on whether the statement should remain within its original category or be moved to a different one. Finally, all of the coded responses were tallied so that we could establish the relative frequency of responses among the categories.

Five organizing categories emerged from the data:

1. Parents' Point of View;
2. Empathy and Understanding;
3. Parents Imparting Knowledge
4. Impacting Professional Practices; and
5. Impacting Training Practices.

Parents' Point of View reflected a growing awareness on the students' part that parents have a unique, yet equally legitimate perspective. This category included statements like "what parents want from professionals" and "the realities of dealing with schools from a parent's point of view.

Empathy and Understanding contained statements about what life is like in the parents' shoes – statements that made it "real" for the students. "I learned a little of what it was like to be on the other end of homework assignments and home programs." "Each time the parent spoke I gained more understanding about their needs."

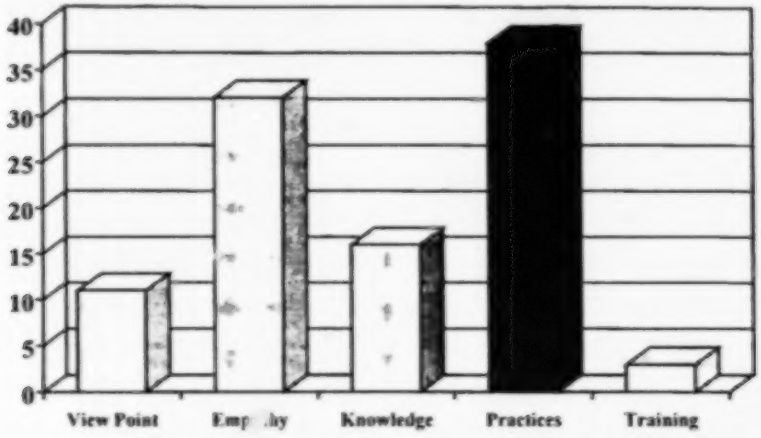
Parents Imparting Knowledge recognized parents as experts who have something valuable to teach. "Parents are the greatest source of information." "Opened my eyes to the specific disability and the unique concerns related to it."

Impacting Professional Practices talked about the changes that students were going to make based on what the parents had taught them. "I learned to humanize the IEP [Individual Education Plan] process." "We need to see first . . . to understand before we speak." "Parents help us to remember that it is not all papers and programs – it is really all about children and families."

Impacting Training Practices contained comments about the value of parent involvement in the higher education classroom. "I just liked talking to them." "This is more 'real' than scenarios." "Knowing the parents on a somewhat personal level is very important."

Table 2 indicates that the largest categories were *Impacting Professional Practices* and *Empathy and Understanding*. The data indicate that it was "a real eye opener" to learn what life is like for parents of children with disabilities. Through exposure to parents, students learned that parents are to be valued, that their expertise is important, and that parents and professionals (like parents and faculty) are partners in working together. The students told us that the stories, activities, and ongoing presence of parents could impact not only their understanding, but also their behavior.

Table 2. Relative frequency (in percentages) of the organizing categories



Will the use of parent-faculty partnerships actually change the students' practices once they are working in the field? As part of the project, each faculty identified two students for us to talk with at a later point. We are currently interviewing those students and asking them in what ways, if any, having parents in their higher education classroom changed the way they interact with children and families in real life.

Partnerships are not a natural phenomenon; they require time, commitment, hard work, and ongoing support, as suggested by our project as well as others (Capone, Hull & DiVenere, 1997). Our initial findings from the Ohio Higher Education Partnership Project suggest that the use of parents in higher education, although hard work and time-intensive, not only can promote an affective understanding of families, but also can impact students' knowledge and skills. Students told us in a variety of ways that parents of children with disabilities have something unique to contribute to teaching and learning in the higher education classroom. The deliberate, intentional use of parent-faculty partnerships is a vehicle that can change the culture for both students and faculty, and, consequently, can enhance the quality of the professionals we are preparing.

References

Brown, C.W. (1991). *Transforming student perspectives toward families: Examples from preservice training*. Washington, DC: George Washington University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 341181)

Campbell, P. (1994). *Report from the Northeast Regional Faculty Training Institute on Personnel Preparation*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University, College of Education.

Capone, A. (1995). *Parent-professional partnerships in preservice and inservice training: A parent's perspective*. Manuscript in preparation, University of Vermont.

Capone, A., Hull, K.M., & DeVenere, N.J. (1997). Parent-professional partnerships in preservice and inservice education. In P.J. Winton, J.A. McCollum and C. Catlett (Eds.), *Reforming personnel preparation in early intervention* (pp. 435-451). Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing.

Division for Early Childhood, Council for Exceptional Children, National Association for the Education of Young Children, & Association of Teacher Educators (1994). *Personnel standards for early education and early intervention: Guidelines for licensure in early childhood special education*. Washington, DC: DEC/CEC,NAEYC, ATE.

Dunst, C., Trivette, C., & Deal, A. (1988). *Enabling and empowering families*. Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books.

Fenichel, E.S., & Eggbeer, L. (1990). *Preparing practitioners to work with infants, toddlers, and their families: Issues and recommendations for professionals*. Arlington, VA: National Center for Clinical Infant Programs.

McBride, S.L., Sharp, L., Hains, A.H., & Whitehead, A. (1995). Parents as co-instructors in preservice training: A pathway to family-centered practice. *Journal of Early Intervention*, 19(4), 343-389.

Miles, M.B., & Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Turnbull, A.P., & Turnbull, H.R. (1990). *Families, professionals, and exceptionality: A special partnership*. New York: Merrill Publishing.

Whitehead, A., & Sontag, J. (1993). *Co-instruction: A case study*. Madison, WI: Early Intervention Program, Waisman Center, University of Wisconsin.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

Reproduction Release
(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: "A Real Eye-Opener: Can Parent-Faculty Partnerships Enhance Learning in Higher Education Classrooms?	
Author(s): Marilyn Espe-Sherwindt	
Corporate Source: Family Child Learning Center	**Publication Date:** 2001

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, Resources in Education (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign in the indicated space following.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents.	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents.	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents.
PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY Marilyn Espe-Sherwindt	PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY	PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)	TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)	TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
Level 1 ☐	**Level 2A** ☐	**Level 2B** ☐
Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g. electronic) and paper copy.	Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC collection subscribers only.	Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only.

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits. If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche, or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Signature:	Printed Name/Position/Title:	
Ruth A. Mortz	Ruth A. Mortz, Coordinator	
Organization/Address:	Telephone:	Fax:
Family Child Learning Center 143 Northwest Ave. Bldg. A Tallmadge, OH 44278	330-633-2055	330-633-2658
	E-mail Address:	Date:
	rmortz@kent.edu	10-24-02

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:
Address:
Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

Attn: Sue Goode
ERIC at NECTAC
137 East Franklin Street, Suite 500
Chapel Hill, NC 27514-3628

Telephone: 919-966-8426
E-mail: sue_goode@unc.edu
WWW: http://www.nectac.org/eric/